

DR DAVID ANTHONY MORRISON — TRIBUTE

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [5.54 pm]: I rise tonight to reflect on the life of Dr David Anthony Morrison. He was referred to as Dave, David or Morri by his friends, family and work colleagues. In doing so, I want to acknowledge his son Ben and other family members who allowed me to make a statement. David recently passed away after a long battle with early onset dementia. He was in his early 70s and he did not get time to enjoy his retirement. But the disease of dementia does not define him. David was an intellectual giant who combined his intellect to applied policy in the public service for the service of all Western Australians. David happened to be my direct line manager for 18 years, including at the Department of Agriculture as it was then known, and the Department of Treasury. He had a distinguished career in the public service. He obtained a PhD at the University of Western Australia where he studied agricultural economics and did groundbreaking research in the area of water trading and economics. He also had a leading role in the development of economic modelling of dryland farming, and was a key proponent of the development of the model of an integrated dryland agricultural system, which I believe is still being used by consultants today. He was a strong proponent of cost-benefit analysis in the department, and that discipline took root and was a major path for the distribution of resources across the Department of Agriculture, as it was then called.

He moved to Treasury and became the director in charge of the competition policy unit. He later headed up the branch responsible for microeconomic reforms in the state and travelled a lot to the eastern states as part of the Council of Australian Governments reforms. He was part of what we call the Hilmer generation, with the reforms that were introduced by Prime Minister Keating and continued on in a bipartisan way. He was certainly someone who was a mentor to me and valued by many in the public sector. He was not someone to play politics in the office, and I think that is why Dave never got to be director general. Dave was someone who just wanted to do his job right. He coached and supported people throughout his career. He was certainly a fantastic operator and someone who did not like fanfare. He just got on with the job quietly, which reflected the incredible discipline that we see in the public sector. It is people like Dave who we do not often acknowledge in the fullest of ways. I would like to reflect on the hundreds of public servants who do a fantastic job. They do not seek adoration or acknowledgement, but they do a fantastic job for us in this Parliament. Dave was one of those people who served many ministers on both sides of government for many years. Dave's funeral was held only last week and I pass on my condolences to the family again, because he was much loved by his family.

Next week happens to be Dementia Action Week. As I said, Dave was not defined by his disease, but I want people to reflect on this illness over the week that runs from 20 to 26 September 2021. Dementia impacts close to half a million Australians and almost 1.6 million Australians are involved in their care. I was extremely touched at the funeral to see Dave's carers there, absolutely grieving. They had obviously built a strong attachment to Dave over his period of care. Without carers we would not be able to deal with this scourge. It is a growing disease. One of the goals of Dementia Action Week is to deal with the discrimination that people with early onset dementia suffer, even in the workplace. The more awareness we have of the scourge, the better, because it can affect all sorts of people, including someone who is an absolute intellectual giant like David with an outstanding academic and public sector record.

David sought to define himself through objectivity and through evidence, research and data. That really showed when his dear wife, Lou, passed away over a decade ago. I do not recall the exact date, but she had a rare bone cancer. I was working for Dave at the time and I remember that he spent hours doing research. In fact, he got to the point where he was giving advice to some of the medical practitioners who were treating Lou. That was the sort of person David was. He was certainly someone who cared for me. As someone who worked for him, I deeply appreciated him. I recall a little anecdote: he rang me at home one day, just when someone was breaking into my house. I put the phone down and ran to chase this person, and when I came back half an hour later, the phone was still off the hook and Dave was still on the line, waiting to hear how I went. Apparently, he told all his family about that. I found that out at the funeral; they remembered me because of that little anecdote. That was the sort of person David was; he wanted to make sure that people were okay. I really appreciated that.

I want to salute David Morrison. He was a quiet achiever in the public service—someone who did not want notoriety. I also want to show my respect for all the hardworking public servants who service us and to reflect on Dementia Action Week, which is coming up, and do my little bit to reach out to those with dementia. Thank you, Dr David Anthony Morrison; you will be sorely missed.

Members: Hear, hear!